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Mind the Gap: Towards a Political History of
Habit

Tony Bennett

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Publisher:
Institute for Culture and Society
Western Sydney University
Locked Bag 1797, Penrith NSW 2751, Australia

Tel: +61 2 9685 9600 Fax: +61 2 9685 9610

Email: ics@westernsydney.edu.au

Web: www.westernsydney.edu.au/ics

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Mind the Gap: Towards a Political History of Habit

Tony Bennett

Institute for Culture and Society, Western Sydney University

Abstract

Habit has become a lively topic of debate across a range of contemporary fields of inquiry: in affect theory, sociological accounts of reflexivity, the neurosciences, cultural geography, actor network theory, aesthetics and philosophy. This has paralleled its increasing prominence as a matter of practical concern in debates focused on the need for new and/or transformed habits in relation to racism, waste management, climate change, the routes and routines of urban life, and so on. In this paper I bring these two concerns together by examining the ways in which authorities of various kinds (philosophical, sociological, psychological, neurological, biological, and aesthetic) have constituted habit as their points of entry into the management of conduct. I shall be particularly concerned with the ways in which varied strategies of intervention into the ‘conduct of conduct’ developed since the mid-nineteenth century have posited a gap or interval in which the force of acquired or inherited habits is temporarily halted. It is this gap that opens up the possibility of re-shaping habits by providing scope for practices of freedom and self-determination that escape the constraints of habit, understood as a form of automatic repetitive conduct. At the same time, this gap provides an opportunity for conduct to be re-shaped by being brought under the direction of epistemological or aesthetic authorities which aspire to ‘mind the gap’ that is produced when the mechanisms of habit are temporarily stalled. The point of entry into these questions will be provided by recent programs for ‘minding the gap’ developed at the interfaces of sociology, aesthetics and the neurosciences.

Keywords: Habit; Repetition; Neurosciences; Sociology; Aesthetics; Governance

I shall set the compass for the directions my argument will take by considering Bruno Latour’s reasons for including habit as one of the modes of existence in his project for an anthropology of the moderns. Indeed, Latour goes further than this in according habit a foundational role in relation to the other modes of existence he discusses. This assessment rests on his interpretation of habit as a mechanism that enables the individual to accumulate the lessons of experience in ways which – by allowing these to be ‘black-boxed’ as automatic – frees her or him up to develop new capacities which, through repetition, become, in turn, new habits. The positive spin Latour places on habit is pitched against its largely negative assessments in the mind-body dualisms of the Descartes-to-Kant philosophical lineage in which habit defines a liminal zone that both separates and connects the animal and the human and, within the latter, differentiates more from lesser developed forms of humanity according to the degree to which they are confined by, or liberated from, habit’s bondage. Rather, he

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argues, habit must be counted as a blessing – ‘habit, blessed habit’ (Latour, 2013: 265) – in view of its ability to free us from the incessant anxieties provoked by the need to choose that would otherwise face us at each moment of what would be an excessively stressful daily life. Equally, though, this blessing can turn into a curse if habit’s sway is granted too much latitude, degenerating into ‘mechanical gestures’ as its repetitions slide once again into ‘automatism and routine’ (2013: 269).

In restoring to habit its ‘ontological dignity’ (2013: 273), Latour also wants to rescue the topic from neglect: ‘philosophers of habit,’ he says, ‘are even less numerous than those of technology’ (2013: 267). This is surprising, as there are few philosophers, classical or modern, or, in between, Christian theologians, who haven’t paid the question of habit considerable attention: Aristotle, Seneca and the Stoics, Aquinas, Luther, Descartes, Spinoza, Montaigne, Locke, Hume, Mill, Bentham, Kant, Ravaisson, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, James, Dewey, Bergson, Merleau Ponty, Freud, Husserl, Derrida and Deleuze: these are among the philosophers of habit who are included in two recent histories of the topic (Carlisle, 2014; Sparrow and Hutchinson, 2013), all of whom accord a significant place to habit in their accounts of the relations between human and other forms of life, and in their divisions of the human.

There are also few modern empirical disciplines that have not engaged significantly with the topic.¹ It has been of enduring concern in psychology from the initial period of its continuing tutelage to philosophy in the work of Alexander Bain (1859, quoted in Danziger, 1982), for example, and the subsequent early phases of experimental psychology, thence following different paths through the traditions of behaviourist psychology and, through the work of George Mead and William McDougall, into social psychology (Blackman, 2013). It was a central preoccupation of classical sociology. It figured strongly in the work of Durkheim and Weber, for example (Camic, 1986), and, as recent work has made clear, played a major role in the theory of imitation that underlay the counter-sociology of Gabriel Tarde (1903). It also figured significantly in the ‘sociology of everyday life’ tradition running from Georg Lukács to Henri Lefebvre (Felski, 1999-2000); is at play, in the tradition of cultural sociology inaugurated by Pierre Bourdieu, in the complex relations between habit and habitus (Bourdieu, 2005); and it informs accounts of the reflexive modern self that we find in the Beck-Giddens-Lash school of sociology and its critiques, in the work of Margaret Archer (2012), for example.

Habit was also of considerable interest to Darwin (1881), developing into a central aspect of the preoccupation with the mechanisms of inheritance that characterised the post-Darwinian life sciences and their influence on evolutionary schools of social theory (Bennett, 2013). And it preoccupied anthropologists for a century and more in their concern to find an anatomical/psychological basis for the differences between primitive and moderns (Bennett, 2010) giving way, with the American development of the culture concept, to anthropology’s investment in a set of techniques for acting on and changing habits via the mechanisms of culture.² A concern with the mechanisms of habit shaped the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century neurological sciences. These questions have also been of enduring concern

¹ For a more extended overview of the varied aspects of habit’s disciplinary history outlined below, see Bennett, Dodsworth, Noble, Poovey and Watkins (2013).

² See, in particular, Margaret Mead’s collaboration with Kurt Lewin in a research program directed toward changing dietary habits in wartime America. See Wansink (2002) for a summary discussion.

in the contemporary neurosciences, informing the varied conceptions of ‘social brainhood’ (Vidal, 2009) that have been elaborated on their basis since their inception in the 1960s. The subject has also featured strongly in economics, shaping marketing campaigns focused on transforming consumer behaviours (Mindy and Wood, 2007) as well as more recent approaches to the mechanisms through which attachments to brands are produced (Lury, 2004). Habit has, finally, been of enduring concern within Western aesthetic theory from its role as a negative counterpoint to the aesthetic sensibility that signalled a capacity for governing in late seventeenth-century civic humanism (Klein, 1994) through its subsequent Kantian condemnation and its negative devaluation in modernist aesthetics – figuring, for Samuel Beckett for example, as ‘the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit’ (Beckett, 1930) – to its more positive re-evaluation in post-Deleuzian aesthetics.³

But how are we to write a political history of habit? This depends partly on how we define it. Its OED definition as ‘a settled disposition or tendency to act in a certain way, especially one acquired by frequent repetition of the same act until it becomes almost or quite involuntary; a settled practice, custom, usage’ might seem quite straightforward. But the equation of habit with custom immediately opens up a can of worms. Anthony Giddens, for one, disputes the equation, contrasting habits – which he interprets as purely personal and individualised routines governed by experts – with customs which he interprets as ‘relics’, parts of a ‘*living museum*’, which represent the ‘*frozen trust*’ in the guardians who vouchsafe the authority of custom in ‘traditional societies’ (Giddens, 1994: 100-102). Simply equating habit with unthinking repetition, then, won’t work. Repetition comes in many different guises and, as Deleuze argued in *Difference and Repetition*, operates in a ‘variety of fields of power’ (Deleuze, 2004: xvii). However, although not without difficulties (which I shall come to in due course), Giddens’ differentiation of habits from customs in terms of a historical transition from societies in which conduct is regulated by one set of authorities (guardians), to a quite different set of authorities (experts), points to a line of inquiry I shall follow in arguing that the ambiguous negative/positive evaluation of habit that Latour presents us with – what Clare Carlisle, following Felix Ravaisson, calls ‘the double law of habit’ (Carlisle, 2014: 27) – is best understood as a part of a historically distinctive ‘habit system’.

This constitutes a different point of entry into a political history of habit from that suggested by what Deleuze calls ‘bare repetition’ or ‘mechanical repetition of the Same’. There is, however, no doubting the importance of the latter. The history of discipline, for example, is conceived by Foucault as one focused on those practices which seek to ‘regulate the cycles of repetition ... in schools, workshops and hospitals’ (Foucault, 1977: 149) and, of course, in prisons too. The ‘apparatus of corrective penalty,’ Foucault argues, works on ‘the body, time, everyday gestures and activities; and the soul, too, but in so far as it is the seat of habits’ with a view to producing ‘the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders, an authority that is exercised continually around him and upon him, and which he must allow to function automatically in him’ (1977: 128-9).⁴ Habit also figures in accounts of sovereign power: in distinguishing those who exercise sovereign power from, and legitimating their rule over, the multitude who, mired in the rigours of repetition required by routine occupations, have long been judged to lack the capacity for self-governance required

³ I have reviewed some aspects of this history in the chapter ‘The uses of uselessness: aesthetics, freedom, government’ in Bennett (2013a).

⁴ An adequate political history of the role of habit in the practices of discipline would need to go beyond Foucault’s largely negative evaluation of habit. See Watkins (2012) for a more positive evaluation of discipline’s ability to generate new agentic capacities.

for participation in the polis (Heiner, 2009). These connections between habit, repetition, and disciplinary and sovereign power are a necessary aspect of a comprehensive political history of habit. I want here, however, to engage with a more limited aspect of that history by considering the imbrication of habit with those two other kinds of power – governmental and biopolitical – which Foucault saw as most distinguishing modern societies. These will provide the main points of reference for a political history of habit interpreted, not as a historical constant presented by an invariant form of habit-as-repetition, but as a part of a ‘habit system’ in which habit, functions both as, but also as also always more than, invariant repetition. This habit system forms part of a set of apparatuses for ordering and governing which, invoking the mechanisms of freedom as central to its operations, also distributes those mechanisms unevenly across time and across populations, serving as a means for differentiating the latter depending on the degree to which they exhibit the capacities required for being governed by or governing one’s self through such mechanisms.

My primary contention will be that the mechanisms comprising the modern ‘habit system’ operate through the gap or interval that is produced when the force of habit-as-repetition is stalled, thereby opening up a moment in which a capacity for freedom might be exercised by subjecting habit’s unthinking repetitions to review, and, as a consequence, to the possibility of reformation – not in the sense of leading to a habit-less existence but rather to a new set of habits. The political history of this gap consists in the variable ways in which it has been interpreted and made actionable by a range of epistemological, moral and aesthetic authorities with a view to directing how conduct should be re-shaped once the force of habit-as-repetition has been temporarily suspended. If this gap was first produced in late medieval Christian theology and early modern Western philosophy, it has since migrated to and informed the conceptions of habit that have been developed across the full range of modern empirical disciplines I identified earlier. In approaching this gap as a ‘circuit breaker’ in which conduct can be potentially reshaped and pointed in new directions, these disciplines have proposed different techniques for intervening and acting within it. The ways in which they have done so have varied in accordance with the ‘architectures of the person’ (Bennett, 2013) which govern how the gap is conceived relative to the position that habit is accorded in relation to other components of personhood (reflexes, will, consciousness, reflection). They have also differed with regard to how such architectures of personhood have been translated into the operations of specific *dispositifs* in providing the coordinates for guiding the different technical means and instruments that these offer for working on and transforming habits.

There will be three main steps to my argument. First, I look more closely at the distinguishing properties of the ‘habit system’ and propose some general principles for its analysis and for understanding the history of its formation. I then look at the ways in which the legacies of the ‘habit system’ – and particularly the functioning of ‘the gap’ within that system – have informed recent debates probing the implications of the neurosciences for our understanding of the place of habit within contemporary ‘architectures of the person’. I focus here on two contrasting disciplinary enterprises: the sociological accounts of reflexivity informing the Social Brain project developed by the UK’s Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA), and Catherine Malabou’s aestheticised conception of brain plasticity. I do so with a view to highlighting the ways in which different forms of expertise seek to prise apart a locus for action within and upon the person via the mechanism of the gap. I conclude by looking at the respects in which more recent developments in the social sciences point to a political history of habit which breaks with the individualising logic of the ‘habit system’ to engage with habits as parts of distributed systems of personhood.

The habit system

In *Of Habit*, Clare Carlisle notes the array of different values which, contrasting with its more positive assessment in classical thought, have marked the conceptions of habit developed in modern philosophy. These have oscillated between assessments of habit as a diminishing force, dragging life down to the level of mechanical repetition, and its assessment as a productive resource as our reliance on its unthinking repetitions free us up to be more creative. While this ambivalence toward habit has been reflected in the contrast between its negative (Descartes, Kant) and positive (Hume, Hegel) evaluations in different schools of modern philosophy, Carlisle places more stress on those traditions which have brought these contrasting views of habit into a productive tension with one another through the operation of 'the double law of habit'. First noted as such in the contrast Joseph Butler drew between active and passive habit – the former gaining in power through repetition, the latter diminishing in power in becoming progressively less sensible – Carlisle argues that this 'double law of habit' has been manifested in many different forms. As we have seen, it informs Latour's assessment of habit's blessings which, as Latour notes, were given a distinctive evolutionary spin in the work of William James; and it has more recently become attached to philosophies and projects of becoming, acting as a bridge between the actual and the virtual, through the influence of Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*.

Ravaisson's 1838 text, *Of Habit*, has proved particularly significant for these contemporary revaluations of habit as a positive force in social life and, indeed, as the lynchpin for the development of distinctive human capacities for freedom out of a set of purely instinctive capacities (Ravaisson, 2008). Ravaisson's engagement with habit was motivated by an emerging literature which, interpreting habits as a purely physio-anatomical set of instinctual reflexes, sought to extend the explanatory reach of the physical sciences in ways that trespassed on questions of the will, consciousness, and freedom that had earlier been the exclusive terrains of theology and philosophy. In these earlier accounts, freedom was understood as the result of humanity's endowment with a capacity for reflection, consciousness, and free will or, in more theologically inclined accounts, for the exercise of grace, through which the grip of inherited and acquired habits might be loosened and conduct reshaped in new forms. By giving these accounts their due, Ravaisson fashioned an intellectual ground on which earlier and purely abstract conceptions of freedom could be revised in ways that would allow them to be brought into alignment with the newly-emerging physical sciences. His key interventions were, first, to temporalize the duality of habit associated with earlier philosophical traditions, interpreting its positive and productive capacity as being generated out of and by the mechanical repetitions of purely reflex actions which were thus reassessed as providing the conditions for a change that is yet to come; and, second, to interpret habit not – as it had been for Hume, for example – as a subjective or psychological principle (Carlisle, 2014: 58) – but as a way of being which humans share with other natural beings while also marking their difference from animal and vegetal forms of life.

Habit, Ravaisson thus argued, constitutes the mechanism through which a progressively accumulating second nature is articulated on the basis of, at first, an original and, subsequently, a hereditary set of instincts; it carries the past into the present while also preparing the way for a future that is to come in which the natural constitution of living beings is progressively changed as the stock of hereditary instincts accumulates; and a future which, in the case of humans, leads to the progressive development of a capacity for freedom. This capacity is exercised in the gap or, as it is more commonly referred to in the

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philosophical literature, the interval that is opened up when the force of inherited dispositions is brought under the influence of a capacity for reflection that is not pre-given but arises out of the dynamic relations between humanity's accumulating second nature and its equally mutating environments.

These, then, in rough summary are the perspectives derived from Ravaisson that one finds popping up in a range of late nineteenth literatures:⁵ in the concern evident in the nineteenth-century sciences of physical psychology and neurophysiology with the mechanism of inhibition as 'the arrest of the functions of a structure or organ' that is produced 'by the action upon it of another, while its power to execute those functions is still retained, and can be manifested as soon as the restraining power is removed';⁶ in accounts of biological inheritance associated with the life sciences and the scope that the gap offers for the intervention of cultural factors to produce an accumulating ethical inheritance (Morgan, 1896); in early accounts of neural plasticity in which the brain, operating as the material mediation between mind and body, held the reflexes in check by bring the reshaping capacity of thought to bear on them; and in the ever-expanding tool kit through which anthropologists racialised the gap by measuring the anatomical and craniometric differences between 'moderns' and 'primitives' (Dias, 2004). This perspective also informed the early development of 'vitalist' philosophies, most notably in the work of Henri Bergson whose account of the relations between habit memory and memory proper (Bergson, 2004) draws explicitly on Ravaisson, just as his work in turn provides the most significant point of departure for Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*.

It was in these nineteenth-century literatures that I first encountered 'the gap' or interval through which the mechanisms of habit – producing difference out of repetition – are said to operate (Bennett, 2013). What most struck me, though, was the argument that invariably accompanied the appearance of this gap: namely, that it is something which only some kinds of people have and others lack. Théodule Ribot, championing a naturalist psychology against religious conceptions of consciousness, gives this interval a neurophysiological location by identifying two routes through which external stimulæ reach the brain, one taking longer than the other and thus opening up a temporal gap – no more than a millisecond or two – in which the 'suspensive action of the brain has time to take place and to moderate the reflexes' (Ribot, 1997: 57). However, the capacity for will and the intellect to modify the force of inherited reflexes that this affords – thus also opening up a space for freedom – is denied those who lack this gap: those afflicted with abulia, children, women, 'savages' and unpolished men, all of whom are denied the capacity for self-mastery that derives from the ability to suspend the operation of unthinking repetition. Bergson similarly excludes African 'savages' from the ability to disentangle themselves from the mechanisms of bare repetition. The traditions of British anthropology developed in the wake of Darwinism that was given perhaps its clearest expression in Edward Burnett Tylor's concept of 'survivals' similarly interpreted 'primitives' as having been trapped in a form of somatic, technological and cultural flat-lining which, never opening up any gap through which an original set of repetitions might be modified through the exercise of reason and the will, has endlessly reproduced a pre-historic set of inherited reflexes hovering on the cusp of the animal/human divide (Bennett, 2010). More generally, David Bissell has argued, the 'pause as a momentary stilling that has the capacity to decipher, orientate, and evaluate seems ever elusive for figures

⁵ For a fuller discussion of the connections briefly summarised below, see Bennett (2013).

⁶ The passage quoted is from T. Lauder Brunton's classic 1874 definition, as cited in Smith (1992: 7).

whose ceaseless movement renders them “out of control” (Bissell, 2011: 2651) – a characteristic widely mooted in the nineteenth-century literatures on the crowd (Borsch, 2012).

What are we to make of this gap? And what bearing does it have on a political history of habit? I broach these questions through the lens of Foucault’s account of liberal government as a set of mechanisms for governing which work through the forms of freedom they produce and organise and, as a necessary correlate of these, the zones of freedom’s lack or absence where different forms of rule are to be applied (Foucault, 2008). Those discourses of habit which integrate its negative and its enabling qualities through the mechanism of the gap have formed a part of governmental technologies and rationalities through which different mechanisms of governing have been variably articulated across different populations. This gap, and the delay it brings into play, stilling the force of habit as a necessary precondition for redirecting it toward new ends, has played a central role in the relations between ‘the habit system’ and a wide range of governmental practices and technologies. Where this gap is judged to be present, it has provided a range of authorities with a locus in the subject to which their expertise, and the technical means of applying it, might be brought to bear by inducting those subjects into directed programs of change in which the capacity for self-reflection produced by the gap is harnessed as a key resource. If, as Jerrold Seigel summarises the disposition of modern Western conceptions of the self, ‘we are what our attention to ourselves makes us be’ (Seigel, 2005: 6), the effect of the ‘habit system’ might be summarised as ‘we are what directed forms of attention to ourselves allow us to become’. Where there is no gap in which conduct might be brought under the influence of such directed forms of attention to ourselves – a matter which is not for us to decide but one for expert adjudication on the part of the gap’s authorities of delimitation – it falls under other forms of direction, typically ones which work by manipulating the chains of habit as mechanical repetition rather than prising these apart.

These aspects of the political history of habit are, then, quite particular ones produced by the continuing connections between earlier philosophical and theological conceptions of freedom and consciousness and a range of modern empirical disciplines in which the legacies of these conceptions are simultaneously partially displaced and reactivated. As such, they do not entirely supplant the political concerns around habit associated with the exercise of disciplinary or sovereign power. Nor are they the whole story so far as the deployment of discourses of habit in governmental forms of power is concerned. They do, however, comprise a distinctive aspect of habit’s political history, and one which has a particular contemporary pertinence in view of the renewed and widespread currency of ‘the gap’ that informs the interfaces between new conceptions of neural plasticity and a range of conceptions of the potential significance of that gap for governmental programs, theories of affect or a politics of becoming. It is to these questions that I now turn.

Managed mindfulness: molecularising the gap

There is not space here to do more than skim the surface of what is now a burgeoning literature bearing on the implications of the neurosciences for our conceptions of personhood and of how we are to be governed by governing ourselves. I shall do so by highlighting those aspects of Nikolas Rose and Joelle Abi-Rached’s (2013) account of the relationships between the neurosciences and the development of what they call the ‘neurobiological complex’ which bear most directly on these concerns. The neurobiological complex consists of those apparatuses in which the perspectives of the neurosciences interface with those of governance

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and self-governance, taking over many areas of ‘managing the mind’ – and thence of persons and social relations – that had previously been the domain of the psy disciplines. The distinctiveness of the neurosciences in this regard consists in their conception of neural plasticity which, in conceiving the brain as being mutable across the life-course, gives rise to new forms of intervention into the management of personhood by posing the question of how ‘to govern, these processes of shaping and reshaping our plastic brains’ (Rose and Abi-Rached, 2013: 12). To be clear, it is not the concept of the brain’s plasticity that is new here. This informed late nineteenth century neurophysiological conceptions of the brain which, in turn, informed William James’s influential conception of habit, summed up, in his 1890 text *The Principles of Psychology*, in the proposition that ‘*the phenomena of habit in living beings are due to the plasticity of the organic material of which their bodies are composed*’ (James, 2007: 105) where plasticity is defined as ‘the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once’ (2007: 105). But this was a limited plasticity, due to end by the age of thirty when, as James put it, ‘the character has set like plaster, and will never soften again’ as habit loses its earlier developmental potential to operate as a wholly conservative mechanism which, binding us and limiting our horizons to the occupations for which we have been trained, ‘dooms us all to fight out the battle of life upon the lines of our nurture or our early choice, and to make the best of a pursuit that disagrees, because there is no other for which we are fitted, and it is too late to begin again’ (2007: 120).

The key discovery of the neurosciences – a largely post-1960s disciplinary cluster whose distinctiveness is that of anatomising the human brain ‘at the molecular level’ (Rose and Abi-Rached, 2013: 9) – is that of the ongoing mutability of the brain across the life-course. This conception of a plasticity without fixed limits locates ‘neural processes firmly in the dimensions of time, development and transactions within a milieu’ (2013: 23), thus opening up the brain to dynamic historicities at the biographical, societal and cultural levels. And opening it up also to programs of ‘managed mindfulness’ in which non-conscious processes are brought to the fore in programs of neurological reflexivity through which we re-form our habits by acting on ourselves through our brains via the mediation of new forms of neurological and quasi-neurological expertise.

It is here that the gap or interval comes back in as a key component in these programs of managed mindfulness in presenting the possibility that the mind-as-brain can – or can be induced to – swivel on itself and, thereby, stall the automaticity of habit so that new forms of conduct can be developed via the new forms of self-action that are guided and authorised by a new cohort of experts. This gap is now produced, probed and acted on in in myriad different ways, ranging from experimental studies of neural pathways orientated toward finding a point at which the gap can be located within the processes and flows which constitute the brain’s activity,⁷ to accounts which, taking their bearings from such studies, organise varied meta-theories of this gap and what eventuates within it. It is these meta-theories – produced at the interfaces of the neurosciences and other forms of disciplinary authority - that I am mainly interested in here. I shall, however, be selective in my treatment of these, focusing on just two such interfaces associated respectively with the disciplines of aesthetics and sociology. There are two reasons for this choice. The first consists in the role that both disciplines have played historically – and continue to play in the present – as liberal disciplines invested in the

⁷ See Ashby, Turner and Horvitz (2012), Neal, Wood, Wu, and Kurlander (2011), Salmon and Butters (1995), and Yin and Knowlton (2006) for helpful examples of this literature.

production of zones of freedom in which varied forms of self-government are to be exercised under the tutelage of – as the case may be – the forms of sociological or aesthetic authority that organise and superintend those zones of freedom. My second reason is that contemporary approaches to habit in the neurosciences, aesthetics and sociology have been brought into conversation with one another in and through the work of Catherine Malabou whose account of neural processes accord a pivotal role to ‘the gap’:

Cerebral space is constituted by cuts, by voids, by gaps, and this prevents our taking it to be an integrative totality. In effect, neuronal tissue is discontinuous: “nerve circuits consist of neurons juxtaposed at the synapses. There is a ‘break’ between one neuron and the other.” Between two neurons, there is thus a caesura, and the synapse itself is “gapped.” (One speaks, moreover, of “synaptic gaps.”) Because of this, the interval or the cut plays a decisive role in cerebral organization. (Malabou, 2008: 36)

Malabou prefaces this discussion by referring to Deleuze whom she singles out among contemporary philosophers for his engagement with the neurosciences. She also follows Deleuze in connecting her account of neural gaps and their significance to Bergson who provides the philosophical filter through which Deleuze assesses the significance of the neurosciences for the light they throw on the role of micro intervals in neural processes. ‘And the brain is nothing but this,’ Deleuze writes, ‘– an interval, a gap between an action and a reaction’ which functions as a ‘centre of indetermination ... between a perception which is troubling in certain respects and a hesitant action’ (Deleuze, 1986: 65-67). This Deleuzian reconceptualisation of the gap or interval has been invoked in a variety of claims about its potential to serve as the locus wherein there is incubated a capacity for radical transformation that is inherent to our constitution as human animals – but a locus that is lodged in the materiality of the brain, and of brain/body/environment relations, rather than in the abstraction of the mind. It provides the basis, for example, for Brian Massumi’s relocation of the ‘higher functions’ of consciousness and volition in the ‘autonomic, bodily reactions occurring in the brain but outside consciousness, and between brain and finger but prior to action and expression’ (Massumi, 2002: 29) where the gap between brain and finger is that ‘mysterious half second’ between stimulus and reaction evidenced by Benjamin Libet’s laboratory experiments. And it is invoked by Jill Bennett’s account of the aesthetic as an example of ‘the “affection image”’ as one which, dwelling in the Deleuzian interval between ‘a troubling perception and a hesitant action,’ untangles its operations – ‘the links – and blockages or “hesitations” – between apprehension and action, between feeling and believing, appearing, saying and doing’ (Bennett, 2012: 4). It is, Bennett argues, this capacity to suspend or hover perception that confers on the aesthetic its true value rather than activist or other demands to make art more serviceable by subordinating it to non-aesthetic demands.

Two aspects of this recent revival of the currency of the Bergsonian gap are worthy of note. The first is that neither Deleuze nor any of those who have slip-streamed in his wake in the radical potential they attribute to this gap show any awareness of the earlier discriminatory political history of this gap in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century empirical disciplines I reviewed earlier. This abstraction of the gap from its actual political histories is symptomatic of the lack of an empirical temper that characterises the second aspect of this tradition: namely, the philosophically overdetermined nature of its engagement with the neurosciences. I am less concerned here to question the accuracy of the interpretations of the neurosciences that we find in these accounts – although the work of both Massumi and

Malabou has been tellingly criticised from this perspective⁸ – than I am with the philosophical gloss they place on the findings of the neurosciences by running them through the mill of Bergson’s distinction between what he calls ‘habit memory’ and ‘memory proper’: that is, between a form of memory that merely stores and perpetuates the past ‘in the mechanical form of cerebral deposits’ (Bergson, 2004: 231) and the singular moment of a particular recollection of the past which – in calling up its image – produces memory as a resource for new action in the present by fracturing the time of habit memory.

It is telling that, in developing this conception, Bergson draws on Ravaisson’s distinction between external accounts of habit as mere mechanism and our inner experience of it. In so far as the latter ‘shows us in habit an activity which has passed, by imperceptible degrees, from consciousness to unconsciousness and from will to automatism,’ it demonstrates ‘that mechanism is not sufficient to itself: it is, so to speak, only the fossilised residue of a spiritual activity’ (Bergson, 1946: 175). If Ravaisson’s work was thus mobilised to place a philosophical-cum-theological gloss on the findings of the physical psychology and neurophysiology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, its revival a century later has seen it playing much the same role in relation to the neurosciences. This is particularly true of Malabou’s work whose distinctiveness consists in the manner in which it aestheticizes the gap. However, I want, before coming to this, to look first at the constructions of the gap associated with the Giddens-Beck-Lash school of reflexive sociology and at the uses to which it is put in the Social Brain program sponsored by Britain’s RSA as an example of the forms of ‘managed mindfulness’ that Malabou takes issue with.

Reflexivity’s winners and losers: sociologising the gap

As I have already indicated, not all approaches to the management of habits depend on or proceed via the mechanism of the gap. Charles Duhigg, in distilling a formula for regulating habits from a survey of the neurosciences, identifies what he calls the ‘habit loop’ consisting in a set of relations between behavioural cues, routines, and rewards which, through repetition, become automatic (Duhigg, 2012: 19). The lever that this provides for the management of habits, he argues, consists in the relationship between cues and rewards: keep these as they are but insert a new set of routines connecting them and habits can be changed without disrupting the continued operation of the habit loop. Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein similarly advocate the organisation and manipulation of ‘choice architectures’ on the part of experts to ‘nudge’ people into making lifestyle changes via unconscious adaptations of their daily routines, choices that they will subsequently recognize as having been in their best interests. The chief lesson of the neurosciences, they argue, is that of having demonstrated a distinction between two different thought-action systems (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008: 22): the automatic system (uncontrolled, effortless, associative, fast, unconscious, skilled) associated with the oldest parts of the brain, and the more recent reflective system (controlled, effortful, deductive, slow, self-aware, rule-following). The tactics of ‘nudge’, while not disputing the efficacy of the reflective system, leave it – as Thaler and Sunstein put it – to the few Mr Spocks amongst us to cultivate in order to focus on

⁸ Leys (2011) presents good reasons for discounting the reliability of Massumi’s account of Lipset’s experiments, while Rees (2011) raises doubts as to how far Malabou appreciates the respects in which conceptions of plasticity associated with the neurosciences differ from nineteenth-century conceptions of plasticity.

the automatic system as the best way of transforming the more numerous Homer Simpsons in their own best interests (2008: 24).

The tactics of nudge have had considerable influence. Thaler was an advisor to the UK's Behavioural Insights Team in establishing a 'nudge unit' in David Cameron's Office of Cabinet, while that Team in turn advised the Liberal government in New South Wales on its plans to establish a similar unit.⁹ At the same time, the concept of 'nudge' has been widely criticised as paternalistic, illiberal, technocratic, and anti-democratic; it 'treats people like consumers rather than citizens,' as one critic has put it, 'presenting them with only the information required to lead an individual to a pre-defined conclusion' (Evans, 2012). The Social Brain project similarly took serious issue with 'nudge' and similar programs, seeking to restore the gap they close as essential to liberal strategies of governing which seek to work through the freedom and autonomy that they produce as a space for the self-action of the governed. Their primary contention in this regard is that the neurosciences demonstrate not a polarity between the automatic and the reflective systems but the capacity of the latter to pause the effects of the former and thereby bring them under the influence of both individual and collective forms of deliberation and reflection. Its 'steer' approach seeks to avoid the paternalistic implications of 'nudge' by aiming to 'change the subject' (Grist, 2009): that is, to steer individuals to engage in programs of transformative learning so that they will knowingly change their own behaviours rather than responding unconsciously to the behind-the-scenes manipulations of choice architectures by self-appointed experts. The methods of 'steer' are those of liberal government in Foucault's sense of equipping individuals with the capacities that are needed to freely govern themselves:

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, *we are not trying to control people*. ... We want to disseminate knowledge about human nature as widely as possible, and in a form that has salience and practical relevance for the people who want to change their own behaviour on their own terms. If knowledge is power, then knowledge about how to change our own behaviour ought to be particularly empowering. (Rowson, 2011: 5)

However, the possibility for individuals to take part in such self-driven changes depends on opening up a gap between the automatic and reflective systems. The Social Brain project looks to sociological accounts of reflexivity, particularly Giddens' account of post-traditional forms of social reflexivity, to account for this gap and to insert a new form of authority into it:

Sociologists identified reflexivity — our capacity to reflect on the conditions of our action, and thereby shape our own lives and identities — as a key component of twentieth century selfhood. The RSA suggests that 'Neurological reflexivity' — the capacity to reflect upon and directly to shape our mental processes — may be a key feature of the twenty first. (Rowson, 2011: 19)

There is, it should be noted, a significant lexical mutation involved in the use of 'reflexivity' to refer to a capacity for reflection which inverts the term's earlier use to refer to the force of

⁹ See Hawkes (2014) for a summary of Australian based organisations offering brain-training/flexibility programs for leaders derived from recent positions in the neurosciences.

automaticity associated with ‘the reflex arc’.¹⁰ It is, indeed, difficult to see that much more is involved in the Giddens-Beck-Lash account of reflexivity than a terminological revision of the place that habit occupied in the formulations of classical sociology. Charles Camic (1986) has shown how, in Durkheim’s work, human action is divided between two poles – that of habit, interpreted as anatomical-physiological sedimentation of our instinctual inheritance, and that of conduct flowing from consciousness, with the former being assessed as innately the stronger force while the latter is to be cultivated so that it might prevail over the former to produce new habits under conscious direction. At the same time, we find a familiar schism in Durkheim between the sections of the population judged to be capable of acquiring this capacity (by and large, the elite attendees of secondary schools where they acquire capacity to transcend habits by translating them into moral imperatives through a process of continual reflection) and those who lack it (those whose schooling is restricted to the primary level where discipline instils a regime of routine habits). It is, however, the role that time plays in Durkheim’s account that I am more interested in here. Drawing on Herbert Spencer’s (1996) and Théodule Ribot’s (1891) accounts of the mechanisms of inheritance, Durkheim interprets habits as a set of ‘organico-physical conditions’ that the past has deposited in us which ‘chain us ... to our race’ (Durkheim, 1964: 304). As such, he contrasts the force of habit to that of custom as an altogether more powerful one. Whereas customs ‘are imposed upon the individual only from without and by moral action ... hereditary tendencies are congenital and have an anatomical foundation.’ (1964: 305).

Debates focused on the role of habit in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century sociology have changed significantly over the period since Charles Camic published his classic discussion of the topic. In Camic’s account, habit is largely written out of the history of sociology by the mid-twentieth century owing to the dominance of Talcott Parsons’ theory of social action as necessarily volitional. In writing habit back into the concerns of classical sociology, however, Camic also reflected the influence of Parsons whose theory of social action retrospectively canonised Durkheim and Weber as the founders of ‘the sociological tradition’, eliding the significance of the contending sociology which, with Gabriel Tarde as its leading champion, assessed habitual actions far more positively in the role they accorded somnambulism – or unconscious imitation – as the basis of the social order (Tarde, 1903).¹¹ These revisions largely post-date the original formulations of the Beck-Giddens-Lash account of ‘reflexive modernity’ which, shaped by its engagements with the classical texts of ‘the sociological tradition’, retains their structure while revising the position in which habit and custom respectively stand in relation to time. As I noted earlier, Giddens interprets habit as being governed by modern forms of expertise whose operations are entirely contemporary, while custom is interpreted as the legacy of deep pasts. In doing so, he merely stands Durkheim on his head. ‘It is,’ Durkheim argued, ‘always a laborious operation to pull up the roots of habits that time has fixed and organised in us’ (Durkheim, 1964: 241). For Giddens, by contrast, habits are quite shallow – they are shaped entirely within the present – while reckoning with the force of custom requires an ‘archaeological dig’ that is also a process of ‘evacuation ... digging deep, in an attempt to clean out the debris of the past’ (Giddens, 1994: 73). This inversion, however, does not detract from the durability of the structure which

¹⁰ The reflex arc referred in mid- to late-nineteenth-century neurophysiology to a sensory nerve connected to the central spinal cord which linked the lower brain regions to the motor nerves and served, thereby, as the main mechanism producing a definite movement in response to a particular stimulus. Seigel (2005: 15) notes some of the issues pertinent to the transition from this meaning of ‘reflexive’ to its more contemporary uses.

¹¹ For recent revaluations of the Durkheim-Tarde controversies bearing on these questions, see Karsenti, 2010, and Lipinay, 2007.

differentiates populations according to the degree to which they are able to reflexively monitor their conduct in order to free it from the debris of the past, be it the past of habit or that of custom.

The 'reflexive modernity' literature thus, as Paul Sweetman (2003) shows, always generates a distinction between 'reflexivity winners' and 'reflexivity losers' and one which, just as it did for Durkheim, largely replicates the distinctions proposed by early modern aesthetic theory in interpreting reflexivity as an attribute that is cultivated among those in liberal occupations but much less so among those in mechanical or routine occupations.¹² The Social Brain project echoes these conceptions. While aspiring to 'steer' people into freely transforming themselves through the mechanisms of neurological reflexivity, this turns out to be a possibility that is not open to everyone – at least not yet. On the one hand, reflexivity is a form of 'self-awareness in action', a recursive relationship to self that is necessary if we are to 'achieve the forms of agency or autonomy that are implicitly or explicitly demanded of us to adapt to modern challenges' (Rowson, 2011: 19). On the other hand, the levels of self-awareness needed for the exercise of neurological forms of self-governance are not yet sufficiently broadly distributed to apply to everyone.

Based on the available data, only around twenty per cent of the population have reached the so-called 'self-authoring' capacity that appears to underpin genuine 'self-aware autonomy' of the kind we believe is required to adapt to 21st century challenges. ...

In the context of our 21st century enlightenment mission, one core purpose of our Social Brain Centre is therefore to use reflexivity as a tool to inculcate the self-aware autonomy that the population at large now requires to meet the demands of the modern world. (Rowson, 2011: 21)

The task, in short, is to prise open a gap among those who lack it in order that these might join those in whom such a gap is already operative in being brought under the tutelage of a sociologically informed group of reflexivity managers.

Freedom's navigators: aestheticising the gap

While it is not the specific instance she has in mind, the Social Brain project exemplifies the logic of those programs that Malabou objects to which, taking their cue from the neurosciences, aim to inculcate new forms of flexibility in the population via the production and management of neuro-reflexivity. Such programs, she argues, present flexibility as 'the ideological avatar of plasticity – at once its mask, its diversion, and its confiscation'; they constitute a normalising practice that annexes flexibility to a docility/obedience nexus. Or, more fully:

The problem is that these significations grasp only one of the semantic registers of plasticity: that of receiving form. To be flexible is to receive a form or impression, to be able to fold oneself, to take the fold, not to give it.

¹² The same is arguably true of Margaret Archer's attempt to shift debates about reflexivity from the temporal logics of the 'reflexive modernity' thesis, albeit that the differentiations Archer proposes are far less bipolar. However, a full discussion of these questions goes beyond the scope of my concerns here.

To be docile, to not explode. Indeed, what flexibility lacks is the resource of giving form, the power to create, to invent or even to erase an impression, the power to style. Flexibility is plasticity minus its genius. (Malabou, 2008: 12)

How, then, is plasticity to be imbued with genius? Malabou's answer is to aestheticise the gaps, cuts, and voids which, in her interpretation, govern the organisation of cerebral space. In doing so, she constitutes aesthetics as a form of authority which superintends how the opportunity for free self-shaping that the gap affords is to be exercised. To speak of aesthetics as a form of disciplinary authority in this way requires some clarification. What I have in mind here, then, is the tradition of philosophical aesthetics— that is, the tradition of theorising about the specific nature and effect of artistic practices – rather than artistic practices themselves (while recognising that no Chinese Wall separates the two). The historical *modus operandi* of this discipline is – as I have argued in more detail elsewhere (Bennett, 2011), but can only simply restate here – one which constructs the relations between the subject and the artwork as a zone of guided freedom superintended by the authority of the philosopher-aestheticians who function as freedom's navigators in this regard. This is, however, an authority which usually occludes itself by interpreting the freedom associated with the aesthetic encounter as inherent to the art-subject relationship, thereby presenting itself as merely speaking for capacities for freedom/liberation/resistance that are autochthonous to the subject rather than a product of its own activities.

As I have already averred, Malabou's take on the neurosciences is a highly generalised one and, in many respects, does not go much beyond James's account of the role of repetition in producing neural pathways, except to individualise it. For James 'the whole plasticity of the brain sums itself up in two words when we call it an organ in which currents pouring in from the sense-organs make with extreme facility paths which do not easily disappear' (James, 2007: 108). For Malabou, synaptic efficiency is a matter of the regularity of use of neural pathways induced by specific patterns of neural adjustments of sensory mediated environmental influences. These are not, however, as they were for James, typified and distinguished from one another by the role played by social and occupational position in fixing, and limiting, our neurally embedded habits to particular stations in life. To be sure, Malabou says, we know that 'the brain of a pianist is not strictly identical to that of a mathematician, a mechanic, or a graphic artist'; but, beyond the influence of 'a person's "trade" or "speciality," the entire identity of the individual is in play' (Malabou, 2008: 7). The brain's capacity 'to adapt itself, to include modifications, to receive shocks, and to create anew on the basis of this very reception' is read as the manifestation of a plasticity that 'makes us, precisely in the sense of a work: sculpture, modelling, architecture' (2008: 7). As such, plasticity opens up the prospect that we might each become free and autonomous subjects of our own neuronal auto-creation. If it is through repetition and habit that specific neuronal pathways are stabilised, it is by disrupting repetition and habit that we can become the authors of our neural futures and of ourselves as works of art. 'Plasticity,' as Malabou puts it, 'thus adds the functions of artist and instructor in freedom and autonomy to its role as sculptor' (2008: 24); it constitutes a view of the brain 'not only as the creator and receiver of form but also as an agency of disobedience to every constituted form, a refusal to submit to a model' (2008: 6). The possibility of realising this potential for neural auto-creation as the brain swivels on itself to redirect the processes regulating its own formation is entirely dependent on the logic of gaps:

The plasticity that situates subjectivity between maintenance and construction or production of newness is not smooth. The ‘chain’ that leads from elementary life to the autonomy of a free self, capable not only of integrating the disturbances arriving from the exterior without dissolving itself but also of creating itself out of them, of making its own history, is a movement full of turbulence. (2008: 75)

These gaps are the product of the explosions Bergson attributes to the ‘energy of life producing a capability for free actions’ and which ‘correspond to the transformation of one motor regime into another, of one device into another, a transformation necessitating a rupture, the violence of the gap that interrupts all continuity’ (quoted in Malabou, 2008: 73). But these are the same gaps that, in habit’s earlier political histories, experimental psychologists, neurophysiologists, and evolutionary anthropologists were concerned with, albeit that they are now subject to a different political construction in the endeavour of a contemporary philosopher aesthetician to shape and guide practices of resistance.

Habit and habits

Enough has been said to show that the gap in which the force of habit-as-repetition is stalled, brought under review, and, as a consequence, is potentially able to be re-formed has had a long and varied political history. Precisely how the gap is interpreted and made actionable are matters that depend on the particular orientations of the epistemological, ethical or aesthetic authorities in question, the apparatuses through which they operate, and the particular techniques of intervention into the conduct of conduct that they propose. I want now, in concluding, to relativise this gap and, in doing so, to think through and, if not beyond it, to reconfigure it.

Let me first, though, go back to my starting point in the position that habit occupies in Latour’s anthropology of the moderns. Motivated by a concern to defend habit from its negative assessment in the sociological critiques of everyday life – of Henri Lefebvre (1971), for example¹³ – that were fashionable with the ‘baby boomers’ (among whom he includes himself), Latour reproduces its modern conception in his account of the role it plays as a foundation for his other modes of existence. He too interprets habit as a force that operates at the level of the individual through the interruption of repetitive continuities that are signalled by the concept of the gap. Habit is thus ‘a mode of existence with a paradoxical hiatus that produces immanence’ (Latour, 2013: 266) where ‘continuity is always the effect of a leap across discontinuities’ and ‘immanence is always obtained by a paving of miniscule transcendences’ that are derived from the capacity to ‘redirect the flow of attention’ that subsists beneath the surface of ‘forgetful and reflexive habits’ (2013: 267). When he adds that ‘it’s up to the neurobiologists’ to show us how these flows of attention work, Latour’s account of habit takes on a troubling universalist perspective, and a surprising one from an anthropologist who has done so much to enhance our understanding of distributed systems of personhood and to disperse individually orientated and subjectivist accounts of conduct across the relations between human and non-human actors.

¹³ I have discussed the political limitations of the role that Lefebvre accords habit as repetition in his account of everyday life in Bennett (2004).

My argument has pushed in the opposite direction, suggesting that, when it comes to habit, the practices of the neurosciences and the way in which their findings have been interpreted in the social sciences and humanities have been always already over-determined by the weight of prior philosophical and, in some cases, theological conceptions of personhood. Fernando Vidal's argument that 'brainhood' – that is, the contention that we are our brains – constitutes a specific inflection of the modern self points in the same direction. It results, he argues, in a conception of 'cerebral subjecthood' in which a uniquely distinguishing human capacity for self-transformation via self-reflection is given a neuro-physiological foundation. This ethos of brainhood, Vidal contends, constitutes the 'anthropological figure of modernity' in the sense that it comprises part of a nature-culture system that has no parallels in earlier Western or non-Western knowledge systems.¹⁴ He singles out the role of habit in its conception as a liminal zone between nature and culture – what Massumi calls 'the matter-hinge between nature and culture' (Massumi, 2002: 237) – for particular attention in this regard as key to the human/animal separation which, in accounts like those of Philippe Descola (2013), distinguishes Western from non-Western ontologies. More pertinent to my present purpose, however, is Vidal's contention that many of the concerns of the contemporary neurosciences have been derived from the earlier translation of the modern self into the craniological or brain-based conceptions of the self which, from the mid-nineteenth century on, sought to give the capacity for reflection a specific location in the brain or nervous system.¹⁵

And, in the case of those who, like Malabou, approach the findings of the neurosciences through the grids of intelligibility provided by the Ravaisson-to-Bergson tradition, those conceptions are, at root, theological, a legacy of earlier discourses and apparatuses of pastoral power. Ravaisson's *Of Habit* was, I noted earlier, motivated by a concern to both accept late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century accounts of the reflexes and at the same time provide a counter to the purely naturalistic accounts of conduct these represented by integrating them into a broader account in which habit was both shaped by and re-shaped such forces. He thus presented his account of habit as a second nature, interpreting the role of the gap in producing this – that is, in stemming the automaticity of the reflexes to install a new set of habits through which inherited capacities are extended – as effecting a reconciliation of 'a law of the limbs' with 'a law of grace', interpreting the latter as 'the final cause that increasingly predominates over efficient causality and which absorbs the latter unto itself (Ravaisson, 2008: 57). In this aspect of his work Ravaisson places a modern philosophical gloss on the way in which Aquinas revised the Aristotelian concept of habit by integrating it into the Christian salvationist conceptions which provided the basis for the organisation and exercise of pastoral power. The distinctiveness of pastoral power, Foucault argues, consisted in its 'claim to the daily government of men in their real life on the grounds of their salvation and on the scale of humanity' (Foucault, 2007: 148). Habit played a crucial connecting role in the 'economy of merits and faults' (2007: 183) through which this power was exercised. Simon Oliver interprets its role in this regard as contributing to 'humanity's motion towards God' which, after the fall, requires 'the infusion of grace' in order that we might 'move and be moved to our proper end in God' through the operation of the grace which, 'bestowed salvifically in Christ ... is continually mediated through the sacraments' (Oliver, 2005: 53). The end toward

¹⁴ The literature on habit is overwhelmingly focused on Western intellectual traditions. A rare exception is Clare Carlisle's (2006) discussion of the relations between habit and identity in the Buddhist tradition, but these do not exhibit the pattern that I am suggesting typifies the Western habit system.

¹⁵ Roger Smith (1992: 2-3) also highlights the nineteenth-century recasting of earlier religious, moral and political "higher" powers of control in terms, initially psychological, of the mind's control over the body and, later, physiological, of the brain's control over the nervous system'.

which particular habits are directed may be good or bad, either leading to or detracting from the realisation of man's true nature in God. However, the correction and revision of habits by the Church through the sacramental mechanisms of repetition and training saves the soul from the need for deliberation on the brink of every decision between good and bad habits, setting it instead along the path toward *beatitude* comprised by an accumulating second nature orientated toward the realisation of the form – the movement toward God through volitional self-activity – that distinguishes human from animal life. If, Foucault argues, pastoral power remained specific and distinct from political power until the eighteenth century (2005: 154),¹⁶ he also argues that 'in its typology, organisation, and mode of functioning' it is 'doubtless something from which we have still not freed ourselves' (2005: 148). And, in Malabou's aestheticized conception of the gap and its relationship to human form, just as in Latour's conception of the role of habit in the realisation of immanence that derives from its ability to 'redirect the flow of attention' that subsists beneath the surface of 'forgetful and reflexive habits', we can surely see pastoral power at work albeit in highly sublated forms.

But this is not the end of the story so far as a political history of habit is concerned. I have sought, in the foregoing, to identify some principles for such a history by articulating (some of) the relations between habit and the different kinds of power that Foucault has identified. In doing so, I have also drawn on the principles of Foucaultian discourse analysis not only at the level of the regularity of statements but also their imbrication with the practices of particular apparatuses or *dispositifs*. My attention in these regards has mainly focused on the discourses of habit developed in association with a range of the empirical sciences in the nineteenth century (psychology, neurophysiology, sociology); on the respects in which these continued to be informed by earlier and concurrent philosophical and theological conceptions of habit; and on the influence of both of these antecedent formulations of habit on some contemporary accounts of habit produced at the confluences of sociology, aesthetics, and the neurosciences. What is missing from this account, however, is the parallel history, more caught up with Foucault's conception of governmental power and its varied epistemological technologies – primarily statistical – for knowing and acting on populations in the aggregate.

This is a different political history in two key respects. The first consists in its lack of interest in *habit* in the singular. This is a distinguishing feature of what I have called the habit system. While including a conception of *habits* in the plural, both good and bad, the discourses of habit developed in association with this system integrate these into a conception of habit as a mechanism that overrides these differences in accounting for the accumulation of capacities through time – whether at the level of the individual or the cumulative times of salvation or evolution, for example. The second is that what is made actionable by such habit discourses is the conduct of individuals. The development of ways of knowing populations by aggregating everyday practices – initially via social surveys but, increasingly now, via the forms of transactional data that are gathered digitally through the exchanges between governments and citizens, and businesses and consumers (Savage and Burrows, 2007) – departs from these two aspects of the habit system. What is gathered are patterns of conduct that are detached from particular individuals, and what is made actionable are the regularities these exhibit in terms of their distribution across particular segments of populations. If these developments point toward a political history of habit governed by a different logic – one which disperses

¹⁶ Interestingly, Foucault marks the distinction between pastoral power and the development of that form of power he calls police by noting the latter's detachment of the promotion of the well-being of individuals to augment the state's strength from Aquinas's concern to make sure that men conduct themselves well to attain the supreme good (Foucault, 2007: 328).

aggregations of habits across populations rather than focusing on their integration into a singular mechanism operative at the level of individuals – recent developments at the interfaces of governmentality and actor-network theory point also to the need to take account of the organisation of capacities that are distributed across the networks between persons and things. The work of Steve Woolgar and Daniel Neyland provides a pointer to the directions that such a history might take in arguing that the character of objects, their ontology, is not given but is an effect of their articulation with other objects and with humans as parts of the structure of the moral orders and forms of accountability they help to compose (Woolgar and Neyland, 2013: 50-51). This opens up ways of thinking about and acting on habits that are not either solely the properties of individuals nor mere aggregates distributed across segmented populations but parts of actionable moral orders constituted in the relations between human and non-human actors.

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